

Spirit of Fire

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Summary: Its been 2 years and 6 months since they have destroyed the Covenant and the Forerunner's Shield world (The Apex). But that was just tip of the iceberg. What they find aboard might change the course of this war. We have reached the Grand Finale, please read and review it. Thank you!

1. Prologue

Spirit of Fire

Prologue

Something was not right, Serina thought as she surveyed the ship's deck. It's been two years, six months, four hours, eight minutes and five seconds since they have escaped the Forerunner's Shield world. Ever since then the crew of the ship has been in deep cryo sleep. The Spirit of Fire's FTL reactor was sacrificed in the shield world in order to detonate the planet and deny the price for the covenant; the price that would have wiped out humanity in a blink of an eye. Therefore now they can't travel through the slipspace and enter the UNSC space territory, which means they have to take the long route home. As Serina went through the Crew's vitals as routine, she remembered all the brave souls who gave their lives in order to save the humanity especially Sgt. Forge. As she thought about him she saw his empty cryo bed through the ship's surveillance cam at the cryo room. The only thing that bothered Serina was that these brave deeds of her crew might never be known to the humanity. "Sad" she muttered.

Serina, the ship's AI, has been the sole caretaker of the ship ever since its handful of crew retired to the cryo sleep. Everything was quite until she saw some disturbance on the lower decks. She heard banging noises as if something was hitting against the metal walls and occasionally some screams. "That can't right," Serina thought to herself. All the crews were accounted for in the cryo, no one was

wake and walking around. She used all her tricks to pinpoint the source of trouble, but for some reasons the lower decks, especially the engineer rooms, are not well covered by the cam surveillance. She was so tempted to wake up the Red team, the three Spartan IIs; Alice 130, Jerome 092 and Douglas 042, from their sleep and ask them to investigate the source of trouble. However that would be unwise to do without the Captain Cutter's orders. "I guess it's time to wake up Captain," Serina thought and activated the wake up cycle of Captain James Gregory Cutter's Cryo bed. Because she has a very bad feeling about this and her gut feelings were always right.

Captain Cutter was dreaming, a terrible dream. He was in a forsaken land and was surrounded by deformed figures. He saw one of those deformed figures charging at him. He raised his pistol to take out the charging figure but he was holding a live, beating, bloody heart instead of his magnum. He threw the heart down in fear and looked up. The deformed figure was standing above him with a crooked smile on its face. It was the flood, Cutter thought to himself. But before he could react, an energy sword ripped the deformed flood into two. And Cutter's savior was Forge standing tall and proud with his Covenant energy sword on his hands. Before Cutter could thank Forge, a massive tentacle grabbed Forge's leg and started to drag him off. Cutter ran after him but then before he could reach out to Forge, the land beneath him gave away and Cutter was falling into oblivion. Cutter screamed but no sound came out of his mouth. In distance he heard a faint female voice reaching out to him saying "Captain. Wake up. Something has happened."

And Cutter thought to himself, 'This isn't over.'

2. Chapter One

Chapter One

March 11th, 2531: Observatory Deck of Spirit of Fire

Ellen Anders was not able to process what just happened, she felt like crying but such emotions were trivial to her. Sure they won a battle against the Covenant and denied their price; shattered a Forerunner's shield world and its priceless weapons along with it. However she felt like she has lost something. "Forge," she muttered within herself. Before she could give in to her emotion the Observatory deck's door slowly hissed open. She spun around as if expecting SGT. Forge to walk in but it was Captain Cutter. "What's wrong with me," Anders wondered and slowly rose as the Captain approached her.

"Ellen, you ought to be in the Cryo. This is going to be a long trip," Captain Cutter said noticing her troubled eyes.

"I have few more work Captain," Anders said as she spun around towards her computer knowing that the good Captain has caught her off guard.

"No," Captain Cutter said sternly. "Come let me walk you to the Cryo room." The Captain forcibly moved Anders from her deck to the Cryo room.

"Captain, I much rather stay awake to monitor this area," Anders

protested, but Captain Cutter interrupted her, "Professor, there has been no sign of the covenant for almost two weeks. There is nothing to do."

"But Captain," Anders once again fought a futile battle with her Captain. "But nothing Professor, you got us all out of there alive," Captain Cutter said, forcibly pushing her into her cryo chamber and punched in the final commands onto the console. "Get some rest."

"Not all of us Captain. Not all of us," Ellen Anders muttered as the Cryo chamber closed. Before Anders could say another word the sleeping gas kicked in and the Chamber froze her and her thoughts.

* * *

><p>September 11_th__, 2533: Cryo Room 3_

The cryo door slowly opened as heat washed over the Captain. He felt like thousand needles pricking all over his body and suddenly felt breathless. He has done this so many time yet it felt like his first time. "I hate the cryo," Cutter muttered as he slowly stepped out. He felt weak, head to toe due to the atrophy of his muscles and wondered how long he was asleep. Before he could call out his AI, Serina's hologram appeared over a console in the room. "Hello captain," Serina said.

"Status Serina," Captain Cutter said still trying to find his footing over the floor.

"Its been two years, six months, six hours, five minutes and forty nine seconds Captain since you went to sleep," Serina said.

"That long?" Captain Cutter muttered in disbelief. "Have anyone responded to our beacon?" Cutter asked. "No sir," Serina said with a concern. "Are we any closer to our destination?" Cutter asked already knowing the answer to it. True to it, Serina shook her head with a disappointed look.

"So, what happened?" Cutter asked wondering what made his AI to wake him up in the middle of their trip. "We got trouble," Serina said. And that was enough for Cutter to jump to his feet. "Meet me at the bridge in five," Cutter ordered and walked to the shower room nearby.

Exactly in five minutes and fifty five seconds the Captain entered the Bridge with his uniform on. At first he felt very weak, but slowly he regained his strength as he entered his bridge. Serina watched her Captain enter and she opened up the blast shields over the bridge's windows letting the nearby sun's ray enter the dark room. All monitors and screens flickered to life one by one. Cutter rushed to one of the bridge's windows excepting the worst 'The Covenant'. So he started scanning the space outside, when he found nothing he moved to the radar screen. Everything was empty.

"Serina?" Captain cutter asked wondering.

As if Serina read the Captain's mind she said, "The trouble is not from the outside but from inside."

"Explain," Cutter said confused.

"Two hours back I heard a strange noise from one of our lower decks," Serina said and played the recorded noise. To Cutter it sounded like a screeching noise, metal over metal. And occasionally he heard, what he thought was a scream. But the sound was so inhuman.

"What is it?" Cutter asked looking at Serina's Hologram. Even she looked confused and shrugged her shoulders. "Get me a visual," Cutter said.

"But sir, we don't have a proper view through the cameras. I even personally went to the nearby hologram deck to have a visual inspection, but I couldn't able to find the source. So I thought we should send one of our soldiers down there," Serina said.

"Agreed," Cutter said. "Get me my Red team here ASAP."

"Anyone else?" Serina asked. But Captain Cutter shook his head. He didn't see a reason to wake the rest of his crew. But something about this situation made him uneasy. His dark dream came to his mind. Cutter just shook his head as if shaking it would literally throw his thoughts out of his mind and listened to that weird noises one more time.

"Something is not right," Cutter muttered.

3. Chapter Two

Chapter Two

The APEX (Forerunner Shield World), 2531

An Ultra came charging at Alice with an energy sword at his hand, Alice thought for a split second and side stepped to the Elite's left and elbowed him right at his mandibles. The sudden move caught the Elite off guard. He raged and swung the sword widely at the Spartan. Alice was too quick for him; she ducked, planted an activated plasma grenade at his foot and back flipped. The explosion from the grenade tossed the elite off the ramp and plummeted to the depths below. The explosion also threw Alice fifty feet back, knocking her shields off.

Jerome pumped his shotgun and blasted nearby Elite, who tried to take advantage over Alice's brief downfall. The shotgun rounds just merely damaged the elite's shield, but didn't stop the Elite from pulling the trigger over his plasma pistol. Jerome acted quickly; he withdrew his knife and pitched it toward the Elite. But the Elite grabbed the knife midair and gave a malice smile at the knife's owner. However this gave Alice enough time to recover. She gave a hard kick at the elite's knee, which caused him to buckle down on one knee. Alice stood up and gave an upper cut at the elite's jaw and Jerome finished him off with another shot from his shotgun.

Douglas was spraying some solid rounds at his enemies with his dual SMGs, taking the heat off of Alice and Jerome. When the Spartans came to the last remaining elite, Douglas dropped his SMGs and picked up an energy sword and said, "He is mine." The other two Spartans

stopped as Douglas advanced. When the last Honor Guard saw one of the Spartans marched at him with an energy sword, he immediately dropped his needler and withdrew his sword. Douglas and the Honor guard exchanged glances for a split second before they sprinted towards each other.

Both swords clashed midair, causing plasma ripples at the point of collision. Both the Elite and the Spartan caught hold of their opponent's other free arm. The Elite stood a foot taller than the Spartan. For a second it looked like the height gave the elite the edge it needed. Jerome looked concerned, but Alice had a small smile at the edge of her lip. Before the Elite could overpower his opponent, Douglas suddenly crouched back and kicked the elite's midsection and tumbled him over his head. Before the Elite could recover from the shock, the Spartan slammed the ground with his sword at the elite's throat.

The three Spartans turned around and walked towards the FLT reactor. Their mission was simple; plant the FLT reactor and detonate it, causing the shield world's sun to go supernova and destroy the planet. That was the reason the Red team and SGT. John Forge was here. When the Spartans came near the reactor, which they were defending from horde of Elites, saw SGT. Forge and an Arbiter dueling. The Arbiter threw Forge with his one hand as if he was tossing a doll. Douglas instinctively made a move, but Jerome stopped him by holding his shoulder. Douglas gave a quizzical look at his team leader. But Jerome just said, "It is his fight."

Forge might not be a Spartan, but Jerome knew he was every bit like his fellow Spartans, both in honor and bravery. So he didn't want anyone to steal his glory, especially when it came to finishing off an Arbiter, the Covenant's greatest warrior.

The Arbiter glanced at his opponent whom he just threw to the ground with distaste. He withdrew his Sword and said, "There will be no female to save you this time."

"Look me in the eye and say that," Forge challenged the Arbiter and spat on the ground.

"As you wish," the Arbiter said and grabbed Forge by his neck and lifted him off the ground, crushing him as he did so. Before the Arbiter could raise his sword, Forge stabbed the Elite's neck, which was the only exposed part of his mighty silver armor, with his knife. The Arbiter slammed to the floor with a shock registered face and dropped the sergeant reflexively.

"And for the record, I would have kicked your ass the first time if the lady hasn't stopped me," Forge said mockingly at the fallen elite and kicked him. Douglas came over, carried the Arbiter's limp body and threw it off the ledge. Alice and Jerome helped Forge in shifting the FLT reactor to the nearby gravity lift. Jerome fiddled with the reactor's core controls, making it ready for detonation, however there was a bad new.

"Sir, it is already overheating. I have to separate the core and the line manually in order it to blow," Jerome said. He was more than ready to stay back and remote detonate this core. He was happy for the fact being the Red team leader he has brought his team a long way. Now only one final job is left to secure this victory and he was

ready.

But Forge kept his hand over the Spartan's shoulder with assurance and said, "Son, I have a feeling before this is over, we will need every last Spartan in this fight. I can do this, report back to the ship."

Jerome stood there frozen. He wanted to object but it was an order. "Good luck sir. It's been an honor," he said to his Sergeant and tried to suppress this weird feeling of leaving a soldier behind. But it has to be done. Someone had to be left behind. He wished it was him. He stepped out of the lift as the doors closed shut between him and Forge. 'A true hero,' Jerome thought and gave a nod of appreciation and respect toward the sergeant and Forge nodded back with a smile on his face.

Jerome ordered his team back to the pelican, now they have a very narrow window to reach the Spirit of Fire, which was orbiting above them, before the sun went supernova. Alice took control of the pelican and lifted it off.

"Punch it," Jerome ordered. Nothing is simple in a war, just like once John, his fellow brother, told him, "A soldier sleeps only when he is dead." He and his team are not dead, that means the fight is not over yet.

* * *

><p>September 11th, 2533: Cryo Room 4

"A soldier sleeps only when he is dead," were the last words that were running in his head as Jerome was thawed out. It only took him few seconds to shake off his disorientation. Alice and Douglas were already awake and were sitting at the foot of their cyro beds. Douglas looked like he was about to throw up and Alice looked pale as a ghost. Serina appeared on a holographic deck near the team leader. "Sorry for the quick thaw," she said without any emotions. Jerome looked at her and asked, "What is it Serina?"

"We got trouble Spartans. Captain wants you and your team on the bridge on the double," Serina said

Immediately the three Spartans stood up and Jerome said, "Suit up Spartans. Time to work!"

4. Chapter Three

Chapter Three

18:45 September 11**th****, 2533. Spirit of Fire's Bridge**

Captain Cutter was running through the list of his crew as he was waiting for his Red team. Five ODSTs, ten marines, a handful of Crew members and along with his civilian friend, Professor Ellen Anders were all accounted for and were in deep Cryo sleep. Nothing was out of ordinary, yet the strange noise disturbed him beyond belief.

Jerome and his team entered the bridge on their MJOLNIR armor VI and saluted at the Captain. Jerome stepped forward and said, "Permission to enter the Bridge, sir!"

Captain Cutter saluted back and said, "Permission granted. It's good to see you and your team son. Sorry about the early wake up call. We have a situation."

"I understand sir," Jerome said and moved near the Bridge's Holographic projection desk, along with Alice and Douglas. Captain cutter moved to the head of the desk and said, "Serina bring up the ship's schematic."

"Yes Captain," Serina said and brought the holographic version of the Spirit of Fire. Then she zoomed into the lower decks and placed a red marker on one of the Engineer's compartments. Jerome looked at the floating decks right in front of him and looked back at Serina expecting to see something more. However Captain Cutter intercepted and filled the Red team about the situation.

"This might be nothing son, but I want my best to scout the area," Captain Cutter said looking from Jerome to Alice and Douglas.

"Consider it to be done, Sir," Jerome responded and nodded at his team. Simultaneously, the three Spartans exited the bridge.

The Red team went straight to the armory. Jerome punched in the code and the doors opened up.

"Expecting a firefight?" Douglas teased. "Never hurts to be safe," Alice replied winking at Douglas.

Jerome picked up a MA5B assault rifle, while Alice took up a M392 Designated Marksman rifle and Douglas picked up his favorite M7 Caseless Submachine gun. The team placed their helmets over their head and the suit gave a satisfactory seal.

"Check the Comm," Jerome ordered and he placed the red marker on his team's radar, the one Serina set on the lower decks. Once the communication was online and the team was able to map the location on their Heads Up Display; the team moved to the nearby elevator and started their descend toward the lower decks.

Captain Cutter and Serina kept a watch for the team through the ship's various surveillance cameras. The elevators descended thirty levels in fifteen seconds and the doors hissed open. Jerome gave a move out sign and pressed forward with his weapon shouldered followed by Alice and Douglas, side by side. Spartans didn't take any job lightly because no mission was a cake walk according to their Senior Chief Petty officer Franklin Mendez, their coach, so to speak.

Spirit of Fire was a modified Phoenix class colony ship. Which clearly shows because compared to other battle ships Spirit of fire is more spacious. The ship felt lifeless due to the lack of its occupants and an eerie silence blanketed his team. The weird noise, which was emitting earlier, just stopped as if it sensed their presence, which made Jerome quite concerned. The Red team placed themselves in a semi-circle before the Engineer's room and halted.

Within this metal door, the red marker blinked on their HUD.

Jerome glanced at Douglas and Alice and gave a go ahead nod. Alice had her back to the wall and kept her hand over the door's control, while Douglas and Jerome placed themselves in front of the door with the weapons ready. Alice gave a silent count to three with her fingers and clicked the door's control. The big rectangle metal door slowly opened and gush of foul smelling air escaped and the Red team moved in.

"We will lose the visual once they enter that room Captain, so switching to their Visor cam," Serina announced and brought up Jerome's HUD POV camera on and Captain Cutter moved closer with his fingers crossed.

The atmosphere here was unusually cold and hazy with green particles flying around. There were three compartments within this room. Jerome split each room to a Spartan and he took the last one and entered it. This room was a mess; multiple machinery parts were lying around in heap and the light to this room was offline, so he switched on his helmet's external LED lights for visual. This was a massive store room that was poorly organized. It was hard for Jerome to move around. His armor was constantly scrapping with the other metal parts.

Serina brought up three video feeds over the monitors for the Captain's viewing since the Spartans divided into three separate rooms. "Something is not right," Captain muttered to Serina. Before Serina could respond to his query, Jerome screamed, "Close the Engineer's room door behind us, NOW!"

The sudden outburst caught the Captain off guard. He leaned towards the monitors and asked, "What happened son?" but only static responded back, and Jerome's video feed looked disrupted. He saw Alice sprint to the door and manually shut the door firm and she joined Douglas and sprinted to the store room.

"Damn it, what is happening down there?" Captain Cutter shouted impatiently.

"Sir, we have a big problem," Jerome responded back. His voice was bit shaken.

Captain Cutter tensed up, "What?" he asked.

"It is the Flood!" came back the reply and Captain Cutter's blood ran cold.

5. Chapter Four

Chapter Four

19:01 September 11th, 2533. Spirit of Fire

The Spartans open fired at the Flood form. Bullets pierced the dormant flood, rupturing the creature as if blisters were poked, spraying the entire hall with green and yellow substances. The flood didn't move or advance toward the aggressive Spartans, but it made an unearthly noise, which slowly died as the flood was completely

annihilated. Jerome held his hand up and the firing stopped. He slowly advanced toward the creature or atleast what was left of it. The flood looked like a flower with multiple petals branching on its side. Multiple tentacles were spreading out of a unison body in the middle, which was laid to waste by the Spartans. The flood form looked as if it was completely glued to the wall, as its tentacles were reaching the wall above and below along the wall.

Jerome inched closer with his weapon shouldered. He didn't detect any movement over the creature. Captain Cutter wiped his sweat of his brow as he looked at the creature through the monitor. His heart rate was spiking one forty beats per minutes, Serina noticed.

"Sir, it is dead," Jerome finally said breaking the silence.

"How did this happen?" Captain Cutter growled at Serina.

Serina looked flushed as she started reviewing the entire ships Cam archive footage from the time of their departure from the shield world. She was madder at herself than the Captain was. 'How could have I missed this?' she thought to herself, as she analyzed multiple videos from the archives simultaneously.

Alice stepped up next to Jerome and crouched before the creature. She took her helmet off for closer inspection since her visor was occluded with the alien's blood, which made both Jerome and Douglas to get tensed as they both inched next to her with weapons ready. Alice took her combat knife out and split opened the intact part of the creature's belly. More green substances started oozing out, but more details started to reveal.

"What theâ€¦" Douglas started as the Spartans saw a purple body mingled within the Flood. "Is thatâ€¦" started Douglas and Alice finished it for him, "It is an Elite."

Jerome straightened almost immediately and announced, "Covenant inside the ship?" and he tensed.

"Serina seal the bridge immediately," Jerome announced. "Sir, requesting permission to sweep the ship for any more covenant or Flood activities."

"Permission granted," Captain Cutter said as the Bridge doors sealed shut. Serina knew that if there were any Covenant in her ship she would have known in this past two and half years, yet she didn't complain, because the discovery of flood within the ship was beyond her belief.

Captain Cutter started to pace around the bridge as he started contemplating on things at hand. "Did you get anything on the Elite and the Flood, Serina?" Cutter asked.

"Few more seconds Captain," Serina replied as she simultaneously was running hundreds of hour footages and cross checking it.

"Get me Anders here," Cutter said, which suddenly irritated Serina. However, she didn't show any emotion as she activated the Professor's cryo wake up cycle routine. "I'm going get all the help you could get Spartans. Serina get the remaining marines out of the cryo," Captain Cutter said as he finally stopped pacing and rested on his Captain's

chair.

"Negative sir," Jerome radioed in. "Our armor will give us some degree of protection against these Flood spores. Getting more personal involved can be dangerous, sir."

The Spartan was right, but the ship was too big for three Spartans to sweep it clean, so Cutter had to take a decision. "I understand your concern son, but we need more hands on deck."

After a split second pause, Jerome replied, "I understand sir. We will rally with the remaining marines at the armory and will split in groups."

"Excellent," Cutter appreciated and turned to Serina and said, "Get the remaining marines."

"Already done," Serina replied. After few seconds of analysis she paused a video footage from the hangar bay, few minutes after the Red team's pelican crashed landed into the ship before they final slingshot out of the planet. "I got you bastard," Serina muttered as she zoomed into the Elite, who slowly crawled out of the Spartan's Pelican with a package in his hands.

6. Chapter Five

Chapter Five

**2531, The APEX; 25 minutes before the Supernova. **

Bero 'Sumai, an assassin Sangheili, stood near the human's pelican under his camouflaged armor, watching as his brethren were being destroyed by three green armored humans. At this point Bero even wondered whether those were humans or machine under those armors. He knew all the honor guards are going to be annihilated here; his only hope was the Arbiter, Prophet's right hand himself. He crouched next to the human vehicle and studied the situation.

He was here for a very special mission; the orders came directly from the Prophet of Regret himself. If the humans were to destroy their God's weapons, Bero had to infiltrate the human's ship and destroy their leader and everyone who followed his command. Being a single Sangheili it would have been a difficult task to carry over, especially against those three armored human warriors, that's why the Prophet had other plans. Bero looked down at his hip; he had a very lethal delivery to make into the Human ship 'The Spirit of Fire.'

When Bero saw the Arbiter himself fall to the ground dead, just like his Prophet predicted, he knew all hope was lost. Now he had to do his job, putting the faith on his Gods and for the Great Journey. Bero, with his cloaked armor, which shimmered and bend the surroundings in pale silver ripples, got into the Human's Pelican which brought the destructive machine, which Bero thought was a bomb. The pelican brought the FTL reactor attached to its tail in a large metal container, which was still attached to the pelican. Bero got into this container, hoping this container will not be detached or inspected by the humans before they took off to their ship. Bero knew that hiding inside the Pelican can be risky as it would be tight with

four other humans in it.

After few minutes, as the Sangheili waited patiently, he felt a little tug as the Pelican lifted off. Bero slowly peeked out just in time as the pelican doors were closing. He only saw the armored humans inside. At that moment he realized the other human must have stayed back to activate the bomb. He was almost tempted to jump off and take that human alone. After all he was just a human. Before Bero could change his mind, the Pelican pulled off in extreme speed toward the Spirit of fire, which was waiting for its last passengers to board.

The pelican skidded and crashed into the ship's hanger bay due to its extreme angle entry into the ship in high speed. Bero cursed as he was rattled violently within the metal container, which deactivated his cloak and threw the package off which he brought with him. In spite of the painful entry, Bero remained calm and silent as he waited for the armored humans to exit.

"The ship is going to exit this planet in a slingshot. All personnel are required to enter their designated area as per the protocol. This is not a drill," a female voiced echoed within the bay as it kept repeating the same line over and over. Bero silently watched as the three armored humans and other humans in the bay scramble out as big metal doors shut the hangar bay, as he know this was a vulnerable area in any slipspace jump. But to his surprise the ship never jumped into the slipspace and he wondered why.

Once he knew the area was clear, he slowly slipped out. When he was out of the metal container, he activated his cloak one more time in order to preclude any of the ship's defense to get activated against him. He took the package from the floor as it slipped out of his hip holster during their crash land. When he looked down at the package his mandibles drew apart as fear and panic wrapped his mind. The package was split opened and the Flood spore was missing.

7. Chapter Six

Chapter Six

19:15 September 11th, 2533. Spirit of Fire's Bridge

Ellen Anders entered the bridge with her usual cold stare and fast walk. Serina momentarily looked up at the Professor and said, "Mam." And Anders walked past her replying "Serina." Without bothering to look at her because her complete attention was on the overhead monitors, which projected two images side by side that made her veins run cold.

Captain Cutter turned around to greet his visitor, "Professor," he said as he lend his hands to shake with her. "As you can see, we have a situation here," he said as he once again turned his attention back to the monitors. "Serina," Cutter called out and the AI played the clip of a camouflaged Elite from the hangar bay and Spartan 092's HUD recording of the flood at the Engineer's deck.

Anders played those clips over and over again as if she was unable to believe her eyes.

"We believe that Elite is an assassin with an obvious cause. He brought the flood spore with him," Captain Cutter said in a very keen voice.

"And he infected himself with the flood spore to mutilate the creature into the next level," Anders completed for him as she turned around at Serina with an angered look. "How did we miss this?" she asked sternly and Serina looked straight back at her with the same stern look without answering.

Captain Cutter who very well knew the cold war between these two ladies, was not willing to get into this crossfire. "Alright, we are in a grave situation," he chimed in. "Our Spartans and the marines are sweeping the decks as we speak to make sure we are not missing anymore surprises. As per the Red team leader's advice we have not thawed any more crew out as we decided cryo is the safe place to be, just in case any more spore is on the loose."

"Smart move," Anders agreed. "Captain, permission to visit the flood site."

Cutter, who knew this was coming placed his hand over her shoulder calmly and said, "Only after the search Ellen." And to his surprise Anders nodded back in agreement.

'That's first,' Serina thought as she kept staring back at Anders. Then suddenly her thoughts were disturbed by a strange feeling. She felt another presence with her in the system. At first she shook it off as an artifact, but the presence was getting stronger as minutes passed by. She pinged at it and to her surprise it pinged back at her. "What are you?" Serina muttered as she took the codes and ran around it with algorithms in order to isolate its location. As she started to dissect the code layer by layer the presence once again pinged at her, this time with a noise. It was a low frequency noise, but definitely not an artifact. Serina paused for a second. This is not good, she thought.

"Permission to enter the bridge, Sir," Red team leader called in through the bridge's speakers.

"Permission granted," Cutter replied back as the bridge doors opened up and his three Spartans entered.

"Ship secured, sir," Jerome said and he nodded at the Professor as he noticed her presence in there, who nodded back.

"Excellent son," Cutter said and turned to Serina. "Serina," he called but for a split second the AI looked distracted. But she snapped out of it and replied, "Yes Captain?"

"I want you to scan the present system for any viable planet nearby," Captain Cutter said, but before he could finish a loud alarm went off which shook the bridge members by surprise. Serina face shrunk as she screamed, "Captain, incoming Covenant battle cruiser!"

Jerome and his Spartans visibly tensed as they saw a purple covenant ship, which was shaped like a shark, jumped out from the slipspace and loomed right in front of them.

8. Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven

19:30 September 11th, 2533. Spirit of Fire's Bridge

The Covenant cruiser stationed right between two dead planets, while Serina parked the Spirit of Fire right next to a planet's moon. Using its shadow as a cover, as she slowly inched back from the view of the enemy.

"Captain, I barely have few minutes before that ship's scanners pick us up," Serina warned as she made million calculations and scenarios simultaneously as she secured the ship into the nearby moon's shadow.

Captain Cutter waived all his possibilities; his ship lacks the slipspace jump. His only option was to stand and fight, but this fight will turn into a cat and mouse game sooner than he can blink. But he had one small hope, his Red team. He can even the odds if the Spartans can take the fight to the ground. Up in the space they are as helpless as he is right now.

"Serina plot a course to intercept with that cruiser on my command," Cutter ordered which made everyone in the bridge to blink in disbelief. Even Serina took a split second to pause but soon she recovered because she knew what exactly the Captain was thinking, it was one of her scenarios. However that idea was in her 'Crazy' section.

"Captain?" Anders started as she couldn't able to comprehend the reasoning behind this idea.

But before she could finish her statement, Cutter stopped her and said, "I have a plan." He pointed at the Covenant cruiser and said, "That is our ride home." He moved closer to his Red team, who stood seven foot tall, dwarfing the Captain by a foot. "What I'm going to ask of you is suicidal. I want your team on that ship; we will punch a hole. I want you to infiltrate the ship as we distract it for you. Son, I know what I'm asking of you and your team. So instead of ordering I'm going ask for your opinion."

Jerome took one look at his team before he came forward and said, "We will do it, Sir!" Alice and Douglas came forward, stood side by side with their team leader and saluted in unison.

Cutter and Anders who saw the true example of loyalty and sacrifice were moved deeply. Such sincerity gave a little hope to the Captain in this already doomed state.

"Get the Red team the schematics of that cruiser," Cutter said to Serina as she dug into the known UNSC archive on Covenant battle ship's schematics and loaded it into the Spartan's datapad.

"God Speed," Cutter said as he gave his hand to Jerome, who shook it with a smile and left the bridge with his team.

Cutter turned to Serina and said, "Charge the MAC cannons and ready the ship for battle mode."

"MAC cannon charging at 17 %, the missiles and torpedoes are hot. The Battle stations are alert, the crew is assembling," Serina announced as she readied the ship for a battle of lifetime.

The Red team sprinted to the hangar bay after taking a short bypass through the armory. Serina prepared a battle Pelican for the team, which also carried a HAVOK nuke if the plan went south. Even though all the Spartan IIs were trained on all type of UNSC vehicles, Alice was the better pilot in this lot. So she took the controls of the Pelican as Jerome and Douglas made one final check on the equipments.

"Remember Spartans, the window here for you to sneak into their ship is very tiny once we start engaging the enemy," Cutter voice came through the Spartan's in-built helmet speakers.

"A very tiny window in an overstatement," Serina said.

"We understand it Sir. You can count on us," Jerome assured back. Jerome had so many doubts on his mind as his heart started to race. Douglas and Alice who noticed their team leader's vitals spiking they reassured him with a smile as Alice said, "We got this." And Douglas tapped on Jerome's shoulder and said, "Spartans never fail." Jerome echoed that within his mind 'Spartans never fail.'

Two squad battalions of ODSTs came near the Pelican. The ODST team leader stepped into the Spartan's Pelican and saluted at Jerome. Corporeal James Jules, a battle hardened soldier who was known for crazy tactics on the battle field, said, "Sir, permission to join you and your team."

Jerome thought about it, but two was a crowd. This mission needed the tip of the knife not gun fire. So Jerome declined the offer, "Sorry Corporeal, we need men to protect the ship if the covenant decides to send boarding parties into the ship."

"But sir," James started but Jerome reassured him that there were only handful of soldiers left in this ship and every one of them is needed to protect the ship and the Captain. James who was reluctant first finally accepted it and stepped out and gave one final salute to the Red Team as the doors of the Pelican closed. Alice who received the flight's trajectory coordinates from Serina, punched in the final commands and dusted off the Pelican. As the hangar bay opened up, the Pelican exited and took the other way around the moon. The plan was when the Spirit of Fire went head to head with the Covenant cruiser, the Red team had to infiltrate perpendicularly as the enemy's shield wears off.

It might have sounded easy enough to Jerome, but he knew if the execution was flawless, he and his team will be vaporized in a millisecond.

The bridge crew finally assembled on their respective battle stations as Cutter asked for the ship's status.

"MAC cannon charged and ready. The Missiles and Torpedoes are hot and ready. Standing by on your command Captain," Serina announced as everyone in the bridge tensed. Anders who was unable to calm her nerves went to her laboratory, as she tracked the enemy and the Red team pelican from her lab monitors.

Cutter stopped his tensed pacing which made the crew a bit edgy and said, "On my mark, exit the shadow and fire the first round of MAC at the first sight of the enemy." Serina nodded in agreement as she made final calculations and steadied the ship. 'God help us,' Cutter muttered to himself. He has taken a big gamble trusting his Spartans, if they fail, Spirit of Fire will become history. He finally went and sat on the Captain's chair and said, "Activate Cole Protocol." He took one final look at his bridge and his crew and ordered, "Mark!"

9. Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight

19:40 September 11th, 2533. Far side of the Moon (Unknown location)

All hell broke loose after the first shot of MAC from the Spirit of Fire. The Red team patiently waited and watched the firefight from the nearby moon's shadow. The Covenant cruiser and the Spirit of Fire were exchanging shots from the other side of the moon, while their pelican hid safely on this side of the moon. They were waiting for the perfect opening; that moment when Spirit of Fire would break the Covenant's shield so they can punch straight to the Cruiser's weak spot the under belly.

Captain Cutter was a wise man, he was playing hide and seek with the Covenant. He exited the moon's shadow for every shot he fired and retreated back to its shadow while the MAC gun charged which made most of the Covenant shots to lay waste on the surface of the moon. Even their homing plasma shots were pulled by the moon's weak gravity and missed the Spirit of fire inches away; Serina made sure of that. Therefore this made the Covenant cruiser to advance toward the Spirit of Fire as she kept retreating further back.

This made the Red Team job a little easier, once the enemy's ship comes closer to the moon, they will loop around the moon chasing each other's tail, which gave an opening for them to approach the ship from the back, where they will be least expected.

Alice had a firm grip on the Pelican controls as she waited in anticipation for that perfect moment when the enemy cruiser would get into the orbit of the moon. "The Covenant is 50 kilometers from the orbit," she announced as traced the movement in her monitor. "Judging by its speed and the current trajectory, she will enter the orbit in less than 90 seconds."

"Get ready. The moment you lose the sight of the nose of that cruiser, fire up the Pelican. That is our Cue," Jerome said as he and Douglas stood behind Alice's pilot seat in keenness. They have turned down the pelican's engine because they didn't want to give away any unwanted heat signature to the enemy. They parked far enough so the nearby moon's gravity didn't pull them in but near enough to be under the shadow for the invisibility.

The firefight between the enemy and Spirit of Fire looked like fireworks from the cockpit of the Pelican. It reminded the Fourth of July fireworks to Jerome, which he saw during his boot camp.

Now the memory of those events in boot camps felt like eternity away to him.

Spirit of Fire steadily reversed around the orbit of the moon as it was aware the Covenant cruiser was following it. The MAC gun was hot and ready, the moment Serina saw the tip of the Covenant Cruiser make a turn on the far side of the moon she fired it. The MAC shot flew straight toward the Silver Cruiser and impacted right on the tip of the ship reverberating the shield throughout that cruiser. This was the fourth direct shot of MAC to its shield which made the shield to finally collapse as it flickered for few seconds and vanished.

Jerome was excited, "Punch it," he ordered as Alice throttled the Pelican to its max making the modified battle Pelican to soar out of the shadows and follow behind the Covenant Cruiser.

"Time to entry is 30 seconds," Alice announced as she squeezed every ounce of juice on that pelican's engine to gain speed. She angled her pelican in such a way it dipped under the cruiser and curved up perpendicularly as it will blast its way into the belly of the beast. She readied all the missiles that were loaded on the Pelican's either side of the wings and waited for the right angle and moment to fire them. She had exactly thirty milliseconds before the cruiser's automated defense turrets start firing on the incoming Pelican. So she had to make this quick and be very precise about it.

Just as she made enough dip under the cruiser she angled her pelican exactly in Seventy degree upwards and shot straight for the Cruiser's hangar bay which was strategically located on the underbelly of the cruiser. This was a smart engineering according to Jerome, because it not only made the hangar bay a hard target but it was also hard to board it. But not today he thought. Today Red team is going do the impossible. Jerome and Douglas strapped themself in as they knew the rough part of the journey was about to start; Alice might have been a great pilot but she was not known for the grace.

Just when the Red team's Pelican was seven hundred meters away from the hangar, the turrets sensed the incoming bogie and opened fire. Alice made complicated maneuvers to avoid the incoming mortars which made Jerome and Douglas to thank the stars as they were grateful that they were not the ones who were piloting this bird at given situation. Just as they reached five hundred meters the hangar doors opened and five Covenant Seraphs exited to meet the incoming Pelican.

"Dumb move," Alice whispered as she open fired all her missiles at the exiting Seraphs. The Missiles caught the Seraph fighters by surprise, which worked in favor of Red team. The Missiles destroyed three out of the five Seraphs as they exited. This made the remaining two Seraphs to divert away from the path in order to doge the missiles, which made enough space for Alice to zoom past them and enter the momentarily opened hangar bay in 200 MPH.

10. Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine

19:51 September 11th, 2533. Aboard a Covenant Cruiser ***_Fleet

of Dawn' _**

The Pelican crashed into the Covenant Cruiser with such momentum it toppled two Covenant's Seraphs which were parked near the opening of the Hangar bay. Due to the thick armor of the Pelican and the endurance of the Mjolnir armor the Spartans were in one piece as the Pelican came to a skidding stop. Meanwhile the Covenant was not prepared for this unexpected invasion therefore there was not much resistance in the bay for except few Jackals and Grunts, which were easily cleared by Alice using the Pelican's outer turrets.

"Remind me never to get in with you in any vehicle while you are driving," Douglas said as he struggled to get out of his seat straps.

"Will do," Alice said as she exited the cockpit and yanked Douglas' seat straps in a single pull.

"Let's exit before the reinforcement shows up," Jerome said as he tossed the weapons to Alice and Douglas and he shouldered his shotgun along with the detonator. Now this Pelican was a hot package since it was carrying a Havok nuke, which is the backup plan if their invasion goes sour. The nuke's detonation will be enough to punch a hole in this cruiser to disable it forever.

Alice popped the hatch and the Spartans exited in a triangular formation covering each other's backs. They picked any stray Grunts or Jackals that were too timid to exit thier covers, with their weapons as they kept their march toward the far end door, which lead them into the Cruiser's engine room according to the ship's schematic send to them by Serina. Their goal was to invade the Bridge and take control and they had to be quick about it because the Captain and the Spirit of Fire didn't have much time.

Just as they reached the door, the hangar doors opened up and the other two Seraph fighters entered the bay. Immediately the Red team ducked and took cover near some craters. The Seraph fighters hovered within the bay as they scanned the Pelican and found out it was empty. Then they started to scan the bay as both the Seraphs hovered ten meters high.

Jerome was able to make out the pilots through the narrow glass at the tip of the birds and it was two Elites who looked enraged since they lost three of their brethren and they were looking for vengeance. Jerome made a silent hand gesture to Alice and Douglas to work on the door, as they were planning to exit this bay without inviting those Seraphs' attention because those fighters can't follow them through the door.

Alice slowly inched toward the door controls yet making sure she was behind the cover of the crates and out of the view. Just as she touched those controls they blinked blue and the doors moved apart. Alice eyes widened as she saw a pair of Hunters stood on the other side of the door. The hunters raised their massive hands and charged their Plasma Cannon rods against the Red team, while Jerome, Douglas and Alice looked back in horror.

* * *

><p>Aboard Spirit of Fire; Orbiting an unknown moon.

Serina was running millions of calculations as she kept the ship under control and out of reach from the Covenant. The Spirit of Fire was making a trip around the moon in reverse while being chased by Covenant cruiser in front of them. No matter how fast the Covenant's ship gained, Serina made sure they were in just enough speed to keep out of reach, and she kept hitting the Cruiser back with MAC gun every time it recharged, which took 5.7 seconds between the reloads. Since the fight exceeded more than ten minutes, which the Captain and crew were not expecting, the Spirit has depleted all her missiles and torpedoes. So Serina had only MAC for defense.

The Other presence in the system now started to make more noise in the system which kept distracting her. She wanted to push this new problem to Anders as she had enough in her hands. In fact the very lives of this ship's crew, including the Captain's was in her hands, so to speak. This distraction might cause them dearly, so putting aside her 'So called' Ego subroutine aside and she send a message to Anders in her lab along with the Other presence's algorithms.

Anders monitor flickered once as the message from Serina popped. The tensed scientist first disregarded the message as she was very keen on tracking the Covenant cruiser's every movement and the Red team's. After couple of minutes she opened the message and saw the content. She was shocked to the core. 'How could she hold back such information,' Anders wondered as she saw the odd patterns formed by this Alien presence in the system. It was nothing she has ever seen before and it was hard to decipher, which was first. The presence behaved more like a living thing than some random codes. It kept fighting back the ship's firewall as if it was trying a way to break it and take control. It behaved more like an AI than anything. 'But how is that possible?' Anders wondered.

She tried to lure the Alien AI to her personal system, away from the system's mainframe so that she would have better control over it. But it kept ignoring her or avoided her. Sign of 'Intelligence' Anders thought, which was bad. Just as she was studying the Alien AI, the entire ship shook momentarily which made her to lose balance for a split second as the whole ship reverberated as one of Covenant's Plasmas bombarded the ship. Just as she regained control over her bearing she found her monitors to be dead. And it wouldn't turn on no matter what she tried. Then within seconds the entire ship went dark.

Anders tried to hail the bridge but the Comms were down. She wondered whether that plasma hit was a fatal hit to the ship as she picked up her datapad, which was the only thing that was working and went running to the bridge.

Captain Cutter was furious, the entire ship was shut down and Serina was nowhere to be found. As if she just disappeared from the existence.

"What the hell just happened?" Cutter screamed at his bridge's crew as they were running through the controls like fanatics as they were trying to figure out the cause.

"Sir we have lost power on all the decks," one of the pilots replied

back in a panicking voice.

"Sir we have lost all controls," an engineer shouted as the entire ship started to pull toward the moon's surface. "Even the AI core is offline, Sir," he said, which was impossible. They got hit not hacked Captain Cutter thought.

"Oh no!" Cutters muttered as he saw his ship sped toward the surface of the moon as the Covenant Cruiser gained on them. "Brace for impact," Cutter screamed as he strapped himself to his seat and prayed.

11. Chapter Ten

**Chapter Ten: **

September 2533. Covenant Cruiser '***_Fleet of Dawn' _**

The Ship Master of Fleet of Dawn, Elme 'Rugutee, saw the human ship plummet to the moon's surface below and had a slight grin on his face. Now his ship has perfectly placed above the human's ship and he could have glassed these barbarians from the orbit. Unfortunately he is not here to kill them, at least not yet. Few months back when he learned that the hierarchs have made a mistake, rather a fatal, foolish mistake (according to Elme 'Rugutee) he started this quest to hunt this particular Human ship.

In a vain attempt to destroy these humans the Prophet of Regret himself had ordered a stealth mission in which he had planted a parasite in hands of one of his Sangheili. "Fools, damn fools," Elme screamed when he came to know about this wretched news. Letting a parasite loose not only put the humans in danger (which he least cared about) but also put every single organic living being in the universe in danger and most of all it threatened the 'Great Journey.' This very Flood killed their Gods, how could the hierarch be so naïve?

Ever since then he and his hand-picked crew has been in search of this sole human ship. It has been eight months since he has started the search, which almost looked futile and heresy in the eyes of many, but he is glad that he has made it. And the fight back from the humans was a positive sign for the Ship Master, that all was not lost. But even he was taken aback by the fall of the human ship to one single Plasma hit from his Cruiser.

He wanted to capture the leader of that vessel and had to make an inquiry to make sure this sole ship had ever made any stops in any planets or anyone has gotten off board in this last thirty months of its disappearance. Because when he started this search he was certain this was a futile attempt, because the ship would have reached any one of their human colonies, but finding it still adrift in the space made Elme more concerned than ever. Once he made sure about this so called 'Spirit of Fire' ship's status and then he would serve justice to these barbarians.

Just as he was watching the human ship crash to the moon's dark side the bridge's doors drew apart and his second in command Sangheili, Elch 'Jarusee, entered and bowed before his Ship Master.

"What is it Elch?" Elme asked as he turned toward an Ultra Sangheili.

"We have intruders, Ship Master," Elch 'Jarusee said still with his head bowed down to the Zealot Sangheili.

"Those sneaky bastards!" Elme exclaimed as he slammed his iron fist on his throne making the nearby Unggoys to quiver in fear as they slowly retreated into the darker part of the bridge. "Rise and send in the Mgalekgolos to silence the threat."

"Yes Master," the Ultra replied as he turned around to carry out his order, but he was stopped by Zealot.

"Our price is down there," Elme said as he pointed to the Human's ship on the moon surface. "Send in our warrior Sangheilis to the human ship to capture its leader. I don't want them to bring any one here to my ship. They could be infected with the Parasite. Let the interrogation happen in their ship itself before I bring down my wrath upon them."

"I understand Ship Master," the Ultra replied as he walked out the bridge but he had other plans.

* * *

><p>The hunters open fired at the Spartans with their massive green plasma cannons. The Spartans ducked out of the way barely, but the impact of the cannon shots made them to be thrown aside unceremoniously, taking away half of their shields. This little commotion gave away their position to the Seraph fighters nearby as they instantaneously open fired at the Spartans. Alice and Douglas sprinted to a nearby cover as Jerome sprinted the other way. At first they had to divide this mighty Hunters and divide the attention of the Seraph fighters. Anything together was dangerous, separate them and then you will get your opening you were looking for, and that was the current strategy of the Red team.</p>

Jerome pumped a shot at a nearby Hunter's exposed region, its midsection, causing to ooze out dirty orange substances which started to wriggle around like massive earth worms on the floor. Which was soon crushed to pieces as the Hunter advanced toward Jerome as it raised its Cannon arm one more time. But the Spartan didn't give any time for the Hunter to react as he dashed forward toward the monster's left side, but with one swift movement, the Hunter swung its left massive shield arm at the oncoming Spartan, which once again flung the Spartan to the nearby wall with a great thud and it also took away another chunk of his Shield.

Alice and Douglas were chased by the other Hunter who kept firing its Cannon at the sprinting Spartans, but it missed all its shot because the Spartans were dodging and running reflexively, which made them a very hard target to hit. The seraph fighters had hard time to get a clear shot at the three armored humans, since their shots were always blocked by the Hunters or Spartans made sure of that. Either way the Elites growled in rage and waited impatiently to finish off these human rats if the Mgalekgolos failed.

As the Spartans were busy with the hunters they failed to notice as the door opened up and four Elites in camouflaged armors walked out.

The elites took one glance at the Humans and kept walking to a dropship nearby as if they were least bothered about this petty fight. The drop ship took off and exited as the two Seraph fighters were ordered to follow the drop ship. Jerome just had a glance as these three ships exit the hangar bay and he immediately knew they were heading to the Spirit of Fire. And he knew he had very little time now; he had to act fast. Since the Seraph fighters were out of the picture (which was a very big blessing to the Spartans), the Red team had only these two Hunters to deal with. But just like that another pair of Hunters came out and joined the fight. And Jerome knew that his team's luck was running out very soon.

* * *

><p>Author's Note****: If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!**

12. Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven

September 2533; Spirit of Fire's bridge.

Captain Cutter picked himself up from the floor after the terrible crash landing of Spirit of Fire. He peeked around at his crew members to see any fatal injuries and to his relief there were none, just bruises and lacerations, nothing his crew can't handle. At that moment he remembered Anders; she picked his observatory deck as her lab which was in one of the lower decks with amazing view and one of those decks would have been a casualty to this tragedy. Just as he turned around to go look for her, the bridge doors were budged open by his remaining ODSTs led by Corporal James Jules. As the marines pulled apart the mechanical doors (due to the lack of power), Corporal James walked in with Anders who looked beat up as she sported a mild laceration on her forehead which was dripping blood on to her white lab coat.

James and his ODSTs entered the bridge and saluted at their Captain, who returned their salute. Anders just walked in as if she was dazed and disoriented. Cutter grabbed her by her arms and made her to sit on his chair.

"Are you alright?" Cutter asked with concern as he saw Anders still couldn't shake off the shock of been thrown around the hallway like a rag doll during the crash landing.

"I will be fine Captain," she assured.

Cutter looked up at his Corporal and asked, "Is everyone accounted for?"

"Sir, yes Sir," James replied as his remaining ten men ODSTs and five marines where sound and safe. Luckily they exited the hangar bay before the ship hit the moon surface.

"Good," Cutter replied absent mindedly as he turned his attention to his bridge's crew and said, "What is the status?"

One of the pilots looked around with a very concerned look and said,

"Sir, it is very hard to predict the damage to the ship, since we have no power on the system."

Another engineer stood up from his chair and said with a shaky voice, "Captain if this power outage continuous, we will first lose our artificial gravity in six minutes and followed by the loss of artificial atmosphere in ten."

"Damn it, how the hell did this happen?" Cutter raged as he has never experienced anything like this or heard of.

"Captain, I may have an answer for that," Anders finally said as she got herself off from the Captain's chair and moved near the holographic desk and placed her datapad on it. "Before we went dark, this is what I encountered in our system," she said as she showed Cutter the codes of the Alien AI which was send to her by Serina before the system crash.

"What am I looking at Professor?" Cutter asked as he saw only bunch of binary codes and algorithms before him on her datapad.

Corporal James moved closer to the datapad and took a peek as he was very intrigued by the situation. Just like the Captain, he also was quite lost by the zeros and ones running in parallel to each other on the Professor's datapad. This screen was the only light source in the otherwise dark bridge as it lid the room in pale blue light barely enough to move around without bumping into things.

"This," Anders said as she gestured toward her screen, "Might be an Alien Intelligence that has hacked our system."

"An Alien AI? How is that possible?" Cutter asked in disbelief as he was certain that he didn't hear the Professor's words clearly.

"How? I'm not sure. But I have some theories," Anders said thoughtfully as she looked into the Captain's eyes.

"We don't have time for theories Anders," Cutter replied with an impatient tone, because he needed to act quickly before the Covenant or nature took over his crew's fate.

Before she could explain further the lights flickered to existence in the bridge which brought happiness to everyone, including the UNSC marines as they shouted 'Hooray' in unison and exchanged high-fives between each other.

"Systems are back online," the Engineer said as he got back to his post.

"About time," Cutter breathed with relief. "Damage assessment," he said as he wondered why the Covenant has not made another move yet. Whatever was the reason he wasn't ready to find out the answer for that question.

"Five lowers decks, including the three hangar bays and the observatory deck, have taken heavy damage with external atmosphere breach. The Engineer's decks are mostly intact and the engines are back online with minimal damage to the external structures around the engine room. Sealing the damaged decks from the others in order to maintain theâ€|" the engineer's voice started to trail off as he

looked concerned over his monitors.

"What is it Roy?" Cutter asked as he moved closer to the engineer.

"Sir, I'm not able to control anything," Roy replied back as he was clicking every single buttons in front of him.

"What do you mean? We got our control back," Captain Cutter said.

"You need my permission to do anything here," a cold, husky female voice rose from the bridge's speakers. Anders almost shrieked as she saw Serina's hologram rose from the main desk. But something was wrong the way Serina looked. She was no longer blue in color rather a dark maroon and her features were distorted along with her voice. It sounded more like a man's deep voice than the usual feminine, sweet voice of Serina.

"Serina, what is happening?" Cutter asked as he approached near her holographic figure.

"Serina?" the Hologram gave a hysterical laugh that chilled everyone's bone in the bridge. Corporal James reflexively reached for his sidearm as he sensed something off.

"Serina?" the distorted hologram continued, "I'm the master of this vessel and I will give the commands."

"What kind of sick joke is this?" Cutter screamed as he lost his last of his patience.

Anders moved closer to the hologram and made an eye contact with that nerve chilling figure.

"What do you want?" Anders said. Her theory has come true, but with a terrible cost. This alien AI has taken over their on board Artificial Intelligence. Now it knew all the UNSC secrets, all of it, including Earth.

"Everything!" the hologram replied. It almost sounded like a possessed human as the figure almost looked demonic to everyone. "Now I know everything," it said as it dug into all the UNSC secrets from its former occupant 'Serina.'

That statement made Captain Cutter to tense as he looked at Anders and said, "Purge that Artificial Intelligence according to the Cole Protocol and take it offline."

Anders looked helpless; no matter what she tried she had absolutely had no control over this ship. She looked at the Captain helplessly and shook her head.

The hologram gave a dramatic look at everyone in the bridge and said in a low voice, "I'm the sin of your ancestors." At that moment all the monitors showed the image of the flood form from the engineer's room which was discovered earlier by the Red team. Then it dawned upon the Captain and Anders that it was the Flood which has taken over the system.

"We will destroy this ship before you can take it anywhere. If not us then it will be the Covenant who will be doing the destruction," Cutter said with a hint of challenge in his voice.

The hologram gave another hysterical laugh and projected the video from the engineer's deck, which was filled with aerosol green substances flooding around the entire room. "We will multiply," the hologram challenged back.

"Captain I believe that aerosol substance can infect any organic species," Anders said with a worried tone.

"But no marines went near that deck following its discovery due to the safety reason; it was the Spartan leader's strict orders," James said which eased the mind of the Captain.

'_If only I can vent that area into the space, so the substance can't spread to the other part of the ship_,' Cutter thought to himself. At that moment a sly grin filled the hologram's so called face, as if it read the mind of the Captain, as it projected yet another video over the monitors. This time it showed the Red team blasting through the flood form with their bullets, which in turn released the aerosol substance into the air. But what followed made Cutter's heart to skip a beat. Alice knelt near the flood form and took off her helmet for a closer examination.

At that moment the hologram paused the video and said, "Now we have two ships to travel," and gave another maniacal laugh. Everything was well planned and executed; absolutely no loop holes and Cutter knew that he has lost this battle.

_ 'No I cannot lose, otherwise every single sentinel being in this universe will be destroyed,' _Cutter thought_. 'There has to be a way, there is always a way. Didn't he teach that to all his students back in the Naval academy?' _

Now one of his Spartans might be infected and she is in the Covenant cruiser. If they succeeded, then that is the end of all things. Because the Flood will have a ship with slipspace capabilities which was better than anything UNSC ever built. This was the first time in his life he wished his Spartans would fail, for the safety of all human beings.

"Here are few more to join my legion," the hologram said as it projected the incoming Covenant dropship with two Seraph fighters on its tail. They were boarding parties, Cutter knew it. If those Covenants were to enter this ship they will enter through the damaged lower decks, because it was the least protected hole in this sunken ship, and unfortunately it was also near the engineer's deck.

"Corporal get your men there and stop them from boarding, and send another team to get this bitch's core offline manually" Cutter ordered pointing at the hologram. James and his men rushed out. However before any marine can step a foot out of the bridge, the A.I. sealed the doors tight.

"We give the commands," the demonic looking hologram said with a malice look, "And it is death!"

* * *

><p>Author's Note: If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!**

13. Chapter Twelve

**Author's Note: Mjolnir Mark IV armor does not have any Shield capacity. But Ensemble studio made them with Shield for the game-play purpose. Since my story closely follows the HALO WARS story-line, my Spartans will also have Shield for the continuity purpose.
**

Source: Developer's Blog by Dave Pottinger (Lead Designer of Halo Wars)

***If you're going to work on someone else's IP, you have to immerse yourself in it beyond just being a 'fan'. This sounds kind of obvious when you read it, but it took us a while to figure it out. Most of us were pretty hardcore Halo fans, but that wasn't enough. We had to understand the motivations behind the existing characters in order to create compelling new characters. We needed to realize where the canon was flexible in order to squeeze in the things we needed. And, in a few cases, we decided to go against canon to make a better game/experience (e.g. the Spartan's shield and sound). I don't know how we would have made those calls without tons of research, chats with Bungie, etc."**

If you would like to have the link to this source, I would be more than happy to PM them to you :)

* * *

><p>Chapter Twelve

September 2533; Fleet of Dawn

Spartan 130, Alice, had bouts of cough as she threw up green sluggish phlegm inside her visor, which momentarily staggered her speed and reflex which gave enough time for the hunter to connect it's plasma cannon shot on back of the Spartan. Titanium alloy outer shell was penetrated as the high energy plasma melt through the titanium like butter once the shield gave away. Her nano composite body suit barely held on as the outer shell was breached and the high power impact propelled her forward as she landed a couple of meters ahead.

A pair of hunters saw the opening and went charging towards the downed Spartan as they charged their cannons for one final fatal blow. Douglas, who saw her downed partner and the charging hunters who lost interest on him for a second, went running toward the closest hunter. He tackled the surprised hunter as a half a ton metric weight Spartan slammed on to the creature, which pushed the hunter away from the Alice pathway and made it to miss its shot by couple of feet.

Unfortunately Douglas couldn't able to stop the other Hunter which walked up to the downed Spartan and raised its mighty foot above her. Alice turned over slowly just in time to see the colossal Hunter standing over her with its foot high up and brought it down on her

with a powerful crash. The smash ended with a thud as the helmet held the foot for almost a split second before it gave up and the visor cracked into multiple pieces as the Hunter's weight got through.

"NO!" Douglas screamed as he jumped down from the Hunter and now sprinted straight for the Hunter who stood over his partner's face.

The scream got the attention of Jerome, who was tackling another pair of Hunters on the other side of the hangar bay. He got a glimpse of Alice and his heart almost stopped. He pulled up her vitals on his HUD and it was barely holding on. He had to do something before he lost his partner. He opened up his comm to Douglas and pinged him. Douglas, who was in a rage, turned around to see his team leader, who pointed toward the pelican. Douglas knew what exactly Jerome was thinking so he broke through the pair of Hunters and sprinted toward their pelican with the speed of 40 mph.

Now it was Jerome's turn to break free from the Hunters. He took his last grenade, activated it, planted it near his foot and made a sprint jump towards the oncoming Hunters. The grenade went off with a bang as it gave him enough boost in midair, as it propelled him over the eight feet Hunters while they were dazzled by the sudden explosion and light. Jerome landed couple of feet behind the hunters, rolled over and came to a stop. He gave one final spray of bullets from his MA5B on the exposed part of the Hunters as they had their back toward the Spartan. This gave the team leader enough time to sprint for the Pelican as they drew the four Hunters towards them and away from Alice.

Douglas reached the pelican first as he rushed to the cockpit and took over the controls. Jerome drew the fire from the Hunters by being the bait as he kept spraying his rifle at the four Hunters as they were two hundred meters away from the pelican. The MA5B shots didn't connect with the creatures, but that was not the point. He made sure that those creatures shots were not completely directed to the Pelican because four combined shots from the Hunters can turn that pelican to a piñata.

Douglas took controls of the Pelican's turrets and targeted the oncoming hunters and squeezed the trigger. The high caliber bullets pierced the Hunters' exposed parts as orange worms started to spill around them. Instantaneously the hunters went to a crouch and brought up their massive left shield arms in front of them as they protected themselves from getting slaughtered by the turret. This gave Jerome his opening as he ran around the hunters and picked up few plasma grenades from the fallen grunts. Once he placed himself behind the hunters, who were oblivious to his presence, activated a plasma grenade and threw it. The grenade stuck on to the hunter's exposed back and went off, which propelled the hunter forward as its dead body slammed on the ground.

The creature's partner gave a howling noise at it turned around toward Jerome and broke into a run. Once the enraged Hunter turned around and exposed itself to the pelican's turret, Douglas took care of things. Once a pair of Hunters was down, Jerome tossed another sticky plasma grenade at the remaining two hunters and got them down, with the same routine with the help of Douglas. Once the creatures were out of the picture, Jerome and Douglas ran toward their dying

partner.

* * *

><p>Elch 'Jarusee, the second in command Sangheili of Fleet of Dawn, walked toward the lower decks of the cruiser with his mind preoccupied. Even though the ship master, Elme 'Rugutee, ordered him to take care of the boarding parties to the human ship and silence the intruders, Elch had other plans. Plans that were directed by the hands of the Hierarchs, Prophet of Regret himself. When the ship master, Elme 'Rugutee, questioned the motive of the great San 'Shyuum and exposed his secret assassin plan with the parasite among the high counsel a lot of commotions were stirred up. Once the Prophet's actions were questioned by a Sangheili a bit of uproar started and it didn't end well for the San 'Shyuum since it didn't support the Prophet's motive.</p>

Therefore Elch 'Jarusee was hand-picked by the Prophet of Regret and made an illusion to Elme 'Rugutee as if he was leading this expedition on his own with his trusted allies. Questioning a Hierarch easily would have made the ship master into a traitor because it was considered to be heresy. But due to the use of a parasite, which could have endangered the 'Great Journey' got Elme out of the loop hole and made him immune to the Prophet's judgment. Therefore the San 'Shyuum planned for a secret mission to silence the ship master. So once the Fleet of Dawn locates the human ship, both the ship master and the humans should be silenced forever, therefore this uproar will be calmed before it broke into a civil war.

Elch had to carry out this assassination very discreetly, therefore once he returns back to the high counsel, he could report that the ship master was indeed helped the humans and create a black name on Elme 'Rugutee. Once he succeeds in this, the Prophet has promised Elch to make him the next ship master to the Fleet of Dawn. As he comprehended the present situation, he entered the Jiralhanes quarters who were here under the command of the Prophet, so their alliance was with him.

"Took you long enough," one of the Jiralhanaes growled when he saw the Sangheili enter the room.

"Everything is as per the plan," Elch said as he was not very keen to explain himself to a Jiralhanane. "I have sent a boarding party to the human's ship. Their mission is to assassinate the humans and their leader."

"And if they fail?" another Jiralhanae raised a question, which almost sounded like challenge to the Sangheili.

"Wouldn't matter, once we kill the ship master and take over the ship, we will glass those filthy barbarians," Elch said with a sly grin on his face, as his mandibles drew apart to show his razor sharp teethes.

"What about the intruders?"

"They will play a part in my plan," the Ultra said as he readied his pack of Jiralhanaes for the assault.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!**

14. Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen

****September 2533; **Fleet of Dawn**

The moment Elch 'Jarusee gave out the command, the Jiralhanaes moved out rallying the Kig-Yars as they were all led by the Jiralhanae's Chieftain, Ferral still under the command of Elch 'Jarusee. The moment the word was given out the massacre started. There were very few loyalists present in the Fleet of Dawn under the command of Shipmaster Elme 'Rugutee. The Chieftain and his Jiralhanes had no problem disposing them since there were only handful of Sangheilis and Unggoys still followed the shipmaster's command. This is why Elch very cleverly disposed the best Sangheili warriors down to the human ship, away from this assassination attempt because they were loyal to the shipmaster till death.

The unsuspected Sangheilis and Unggoys were slaughtered with no mercy and Elch made sure it was silent and quick. He also made certain that the shipmaster's attention was completely on the human's ship; not on his own ship. Therefore he disabled every single visual device in the interiors of the ship, which he blamed on the intruders (Armored humans) and went out of the bridge to sort it out (at least that is what the shipmaster was thinking). The ship had four pairs of Mgalekgolos, which he conveniently disposed two pairs against the human intruders, but the remaining two pairs proved little bit harder to dispose, because those creatures realized the betrayal and started to fight back. But even those massive creatures were no match to the Chieftain Ferral's Hammer strikes.

As last of the loyalists under the command of Elme 'Rugutee died, Elch withdrew his team back into the deep quarters and waited.

"What are we waiting for?" Ferral growled as his muscles tensed around his mighty hammer.

The Sangheili gave a dismissive glance at the Chieftain but didn't respond back to him as he was concentrating on the ship's scanner and was trying to locate the armored humans.

"I asked you a question," the Chieftain threatened as he inched closer to Elch. "We have cleared every single traitor in this ship, now let my Jiralhanaes move into the bridge and finish the shipmaster and his remaining minions."

"All in good time," Elch replied as he finally pinpointed the location of the advancing humans. He was very pleased to see that there were only two of the armored humans now. However, the Jiralhanaes were not happy with the Sangheili's answer as they started to get impatient, which made the Kig-Yars nervous as they slowly backed away from the Chieftain and his men.

Elch finally looked up and pointed the console screen to Ferral and said, "You see those humans, they will be the ones who will finish

off the shipmaster, so that we will have something to show back to the counsel."

"What if they find us first?" Ferral asked as if he was looking forward to that interaction.

"No," Elch replied firmly back. "They will go to the bridge first. Since the path is clear, they will not have a second thought."

"How are you so sure?" Ferral asked as he slowly studied the advancing humans on the screen.

"Because," Elch said finally as he drew out his Plasma sword, "I would do the same."

* * *

><p>After safely placing the fatally wounded Alice into the Pelican, Jerome and Douglas moved deep within the ship. They almost sprinted because they were losing precious seconds, if they don't take over the bridge sooner, the fate of Spirit of fire will be doomed. The Spartans made a mad dash through the ship's interiors with their weapons ready and a mind set to take anything head on without any second thought. Because slow and steady approach was not an option, either they do it or die trying. If they don't succeed, everyone is dead anyway.</p>

After making couple of turns, the Spartans came to a skidding stop. What lay before them made the Spartans to question their own sanity. The floor was filled with dead corpse of Elites and Grunts. The Spartans took a slow and careful stroll across the corpses as they made sure the dead being were really dead and that they were not walking into some kind of trap.

"Civil war?" Douglas asked.

"Not sure," Jerome replied, as the Spartans picked up their pace. "I don't like a single bit of this."

There were more corpses on every corner and the Spartans were more concerned but they tactically plucked the grenades from the fallen creatures. Jerome and Douglas each took a Plasma sword from the fallen Elites and holstered it.

"Something is not right," Jerome said, as more sweats started to dribble along his forehead and to his cheeks.

After ascending couple of levels and passing through many more corridors with dead covenant all over the place, the Spartans finally reached the main hallway that led straight to the ship's bridge. There was a ghostly silence in the ship, and reaching the bridge almost sounded like an insane idea. But it had to be done, Jerome thought and he has his orders.

"Look," Douglas pointed the floor. There were many broad foot prints among the purple and green blood spattered floor and those foot prints moved away from the bridge and into the nearby ship's gravity lift.

"There was a fight here and the accomplices are still alive," Douglas

pointed out.

This was a trap; Jerome knew it because every single cell in his body screamed at him to stay away from the bridge. Splitting an already two man team was suicidal, so he had to take another decision now.

"We are going in," Jerome finally decided and Douglas, even though had the same doubts and fear, nodded back at his team leader and the Spartans sprinted toward the Fleet of Dawn's bridge.

* * *

><p>Elme 'Rugutee carefully followed his boarding party on his monitors as he comfortably sat on his throne. His best warriors were disposed to the human's ship under the suggestion of Elch. He was satisfied with this whole mission, because it was a mighty success to him. Now once he gets the information he needs and carried out his mission to its fullest he will return back to the High Charity with his chest held high, once again proving to the High Counsel why the Sangheilis were the best and supreme species among the Covenant.</p>

Even though initially he disapproved of Jiralhanaes on his ship, he was later over ruled by the counsel. Questioning a San 'Shyuum was one thing, but disagreeing with the whole Counsel was a whole other thing. Since Elme didn't want to push his luck, he had to, reluctantly accept their presence in his mission.

The Sangheilis made their final descend near the human ship and his warriors entered the ship after the Seraph birds blew a hole through an already weakened hull. Soon the Sangheilis disappeared within the human ship, the Unggoy, who was in charge for tracking the boarding party, brought up the leading Sangheili's external HUD camera over the monitor so it will be easier for shipmaster to see what was going on. The bridge of Dawn contained only a handful of crew; three Unggoys controlling the bridge's monitors and two honor guards who were with the Ship master at all times.

Elme 'Rugutee was so absorbed with what was going on over the monitor he failed to notice a slight movement over his peripherals. He finally turned around from his throne when he heard a large thud, as if someone crashed onto the floor. When his vision focused on to the entrance of his bridge, his eyes widened with astonishment. Two green armored humans were standing over the two corpses at the entrance. The two corpses belonged to his former Honor guards who were assassinated by the humans from the back.

Elme knew he was weaponless and cornered; he couldn't do much but waited as the two humans had him at their gunpoint. His Unggoys tried to reach for their plasma pistols but those three poor bastards were taken out in a single, swift movement from one of the humans' sidearm. But the other human had Elme at his point all the time, without making even a single twitch and without moving an inch.

The shipmaster was both bewildered and amazed at the achievement of these humans to reach his bridge undetected but he knew that they could have sneaked their way up here and not killing an entire armada of his legions on their way. Because he would have known if such an act was carried out within his ship. He patiently waited hoping his

Ultra would walk in anytime with his warriors to take out these sneaky barbarians. As seconds passed which felt like hours, no one came to his aid and he noticed both the human's fingers tensed around their weapon's trigger. Elme's situation was hopeless and he needed to do something now and be quick about it, however the moment he twitched, the triggers were pulled.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!

15. Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fourteen

September 2533; Spirit of Fire's bridge.

The Flood Intelligence was telecasting everything live to the members of the bridge through the monitors. Captain Cutter and the crew saw with utmost horror as the Elites drop into the weakened section of the lower decks and marched forward. The Flood AI had a smirk in its face as it tactfully diverted the boarding party into the most dreaded Engineer's deck. The AI smartly closed certain paths and opened few others and mainly it dropped a marker into the Elite's scanner system, tricking them to believe that the way to the ship's bridge was through the Engineer's deck; where the aerosol flood spores were waiting to be inhaled into the unsuspected victim's respiratory system. They looked merely like dust particles floating around but a keen eye can notice the difference.

Corporal James and his marines (ten ODSTs and five Marines) were breaking their backs to pull the door apart; even though the AI had it closed shut. As some marines were literally pulling it apart, others started to break the electronic parts of the door. Apart from suffering from few electrical shocks, the marines almost succeeded in taking the bridge doors apart piece by piece. But this was just one door compared to fifteen more to the lower decks, even if you slide down through the elevator shaft, if you had to reach to those elites.

"Enough," the Flood AI bellowed at the marines. "Anymore of this, I will direct my spores through the ventilation system into the bridge. Then you will be breathing them in seconds."

This statement literally brought everyone to stand still as the marines just dropped what they were doing and stood silently as if they were all turned into clay stones.

"What the hell do you want from us?" Captain Cutter screamed at the AI, but it completely ignored him and was still staring at the monitors with that cunning smile on it's disfigured face.

The four Elites took off their breathing masks as they entered the inner part of the lower decks were the atmosphere was still intact. Due to the oxygen limitation in the breathing apparatus, the Elites had them stowed back for later use if needed. The moment the four Elites reached the Engineer deck's main hall they saw a dark hallway ahead of them with a weird smell, as if something was rotten down

here. The AI purposely left the place dark, so that the green flood spore particles floating around wouldn't be so apparent.

The Elites drew their Plasma weapons and slowly advanced into the hall. Within few seconds all the four Sangheilis drew in the spore particles through their nostrils. The spores rapidly advanced into the bronchioles and later into the alveolus. Usually the air exchange occurs with the blood through a barrier as it took in the essential elements and threw out the rest. But the spores slowly made its way into the blood stream breaking the barrier by making micro pores in the Alveolus. This gave the first bout of cough to the Elites as all four threw up a little bit of blood and phlegm with each cough.

Once enough spores got transferred into the blood, as if metal attracted to the magnet, the spores went straight to the creature's Central Nervous System. The tiny spores attached themselves to the synapses of the both sympathetic and parasympathetic ganglion of the victims. This is when the Elites started to feel a strange tingling sensation down their limbs. It took few minutes for the spore to take full control of the victim due to the inhalation method. If this was in flood form, it would have incapacitated the victim in seconds. By the time the flood took control over the central and peripheral nervous system of the Elites, they advanced all the way to the upper decks of the Spirit of fire and made their final march to the bridge.

Every single human being in the bridge was dying with anticipation and terror. Captain Cutter's heart was in frenzy as he and the other crews of the bridge were cornered away from the door as Corporal James and his men formed a two row and had the door at their gunpoint.

"You think I'm a fool?" the AI threatened as it saw the battle formation from the marines.

"Shut you're a-hole," Corporal James shouted back, since he didn't find this situation any different from any of his previous rodeos. He and his men had this under control; no flood is going to get past them.

As everyone's eyesight and mind was fixed on the bridge's door and its horror outside, Anders slowly backed away from everything and was frantically typing in commands into her datapad. Since her personal pad was free from the system mainframe, she had total control over it, and in order to hack her pad, it literally had to be plugged into the system. So she knew that her pad was safe from the Flood Intelligence. She was desperately trying to contact the Spartans in the Covenant ship, but the task was much, much harder than she thought. But she didn't give up, she kept trying.

The advancing Elites' eye sight got blurred as they suddenly dropped to the floor like a rock with another series of cough with blood and green mucus. Even though they were conscious, they couldn't able to move any of their limbs. Slowly their skin integrity tore, as small blisters started to form rapidly. Those sore blisters soon broke as small tentacles started to wither out of those sore points. The flood finally took the entire control the host's nervous system, as it now had control of all the motor, sensory and even the hormonal release in the body. But instead of completely killing its host, like a decapitated victim, it kept their consciousness alive as it slowly

learned every single thoughts, memories and secrets of the host â€“ the Covenant, the great journey, the hierarchy, human-covenant war, and high charity.

"_The Key_!" the flood AI muttered as it saw the memory images of the _High charity_ and the _Dreadnought_ from one of the elites.

The bodies of the host started to wither around like fish out of water as tentacles started to grow from every blister. It broke through the armors like a hot knife through cheese. They were only few feet away from the bridge door when this transformation started. The Flood intelligence didn't want any other form, just the Carrier form specifically, because changing them into any combat form can easily be destroyed by the humans. However, when the carrier form is made it can generate and nurture many spores within and can release it upon destruction.

Anders slowly walked toward the Captain and tugged on his uniform silently as if an eleven year old daughter would call up on her dad without alerting the mom. Cutter spun around and looked at her questioningly. She brought up her data pad and showed it to the Captain. It showed the schematic of the ventilation system of this ship.

"Captain, the AI is bluffing. The bridge's ventilation system is completely independent from the rest of the ship. Because in times of extreme danger, the entire ship can lose the atmosphere, but the crew of the bridge can survive due to its independent ventilation system. So the spores cannot be transferred from the lower decks. It can be distributed to any part of the ship, but not here. So we want that door to be intact at all cost," Anders said in a whisper.

Captain Cutter nodded in agreement and he silently passed the news to the Corporal James, who looked up in surprise upon hearing this news and moved to his men and ordered, "Jam the damn door shut. Nothing should ever come through it."

The marines jumped like they were shocked as they went to work immediately, since they don't have to be told twice or a reason. The Flood intelligence didn't take long to figure out that the humans have figured out it's bluff, therefore it tried to open the door. Fortunately the door's mechanical wheels, that rolled in order to open the door, were tightly jammed by the marines with every single equipment their hands could grab. AI knows that any _Combat form flood_ could have pounded through the door, but the _Carrier form flood_ lacked the strength due to majority of it's body surface given to cocoon the spores. Now the only way to get to the humans were by decompressing the bridge's atmosphere; but the flood wanted every single soul's consciousness because it was not trying to make just a flood army, it wanted to form a _GRAVEMIND_.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!

16. Climax part I

Chapter Fifteen

Climax part I: An unexpected friend

Spartans tensed as they saw the Elite leader move from his throne. Both open fired, but their quick reflex was equally matched by their opponent as the Elite activated his energy sword in one swift movement, which he used as a shield before him in order to divert the incoming projectiles, as he slipped from his seat and dashed to the nearby console taking cover. Even though the Spartans shots didn't make a fatal impact it took away the Elite's armor shield. Elme 'Rugutee hid behind one of his bridge's console with his sword ready and panting as his armor shield failed to recharge. The bullets have penetrated his armor's power circuit; therefore the shield kept flickering but remained down.

Jerome cursed under his breath as he and Douglas moved slowly around the shipmaster's throne, which was located in the middle of the bridge. They had their weapons ready and were very cautious as they try to flank the presumed hideout of the Elite leader. Their visors adjusted to the low light room as it slowly highlighted the dimly lit corners of the bridge. They kept circling around in this oval shaped bridge as they closely hugged the walls behind, moving away from the door. Elme 'Rugutee stayed put as he held his breath and steadied his grip on the sword because he had only one chance at this; one Elite versus two Spartans, according to him the odds were even though his shields were down.

Just as the Elite and the Spartans caught each other's shadow in their peripheral visions the bridge door blinked twice and pulled apart as Elch 'Jarusee and his Chieftain, Ferral entered the bridge with their entire Jiralhanaes and Kig-Yars standing just outside with all their weapons ready. Immediately the Spartans trained their weapons toward the new threat, an unexpected complication in their already complex mission. Their doom was near, both Jerome and Douglas could feel it, but they were not willing to go down without a bang! The Shipmaster's hope elevated as he saw his army standing at the doorsteps for his rescue as he slowly rose from the covers.

"Brothers, I'm eternally grateful for your timely intervention," Elme 'Rugutee said. "Destroy these barbarians in the name of the great journey."

"I'm disappointed," Elch 'Jarusee slowly replied.

And to the shipmaster's surprise his Ultra was talking to the Spartans. Both Jerome and Douglas glanced at each other for a split second as they were confused as to why this Elite was addressing to them.

After a minute of silence the Ultra looked at his Brute Chieftain and said, "Finish the demons. I will kill the heretic myself. The time is running out." Ferral gave a crooked smile through his razor sharp teethes as he advanced toward the Spartans with his mighty hammer.

"Traitor!" bellowed the shipmaster as he slowly understood his commander's betrayal. "The high counsel will have your head on a spike for this," Elme 'Rugutee said still unable to comprehend the situation around him.

"You fool; your death was the High Counsel's decision. And I am here to fulfill their wish for the Great Journey," Elch 'Jarusee said with a smirk and a complete satisfied look after seeing the shipmaster's dumbfounded face after hearing the truth.

Elme 'Rugutee roared in anger, however before he could charge at his disloyal companion, Elch 'Jarusee fired his plasma pistol, which grazed the shipmaster's right palm as it knocked his energy sword out of his grip. Before anyone could react Jerome did something not only made Douglas to drop his jaw but it made every single covenant species in and around bridge to stare in disbelief. Jerome tossed his shotgun at the Shipmaster, who caught the gun in mid air. Elme was staring back at the Spartan with skepticism, nevertheless he accepted the sudden turn of favor. Jerome who could sense the burning stare of his partner whispered back, "Enemy of your enemy is your friend!"

This sudden and unexpected turn of events made both Elch 'Jarusee and Ferral to stop dead at their tracks as they were analyzing this bizarre partnership. Before the Brute Chieftain could recover from the shock, Jerome activated his energy sword and made a mad dash toward the nine feet brute as Douglas open fired with his MA5B. Within seconds chaos erupted as the Spartans charged the mighty Chieftain and the Shipmaster went one on one with the Ultra, while the rest of the Jiralhanaes and Kig-Yars stood outside the bridge watching the fight without intervening due to the limited space within the confined bridge.

Feral swung his hammer at the incoming Spartan, but Jerome made a leap to his side avoiding the smash. However the shockwave created by the hammer hitting the ground made the entire room to shake and it also threw both Jerome and Douglas off their feet as they landed hard. Feral made a satisfied sound as he once more raised his hammer and made a move toward Jerome who was still recovering from the fall. Before the Brute could bring down his hammer, Douglas open fired at the Chieftain. The bullets bounced off the brute's shield but it slowed the creature. Feral turned toward Douglas and made a run for him. But the downed Spartan didn't make any escape, he had his gun steady toward the incoming Brute and open fired continuously until his magazine ran empty. However he peppered enough bullets onto the Chieftain which significantly lowered his shield. By the time Feral reached the downed Spartan and rose his hammer one more time for the final blow, Jerome made a quick leap behind the Brute and got onto the creature's back, just like a cowboy rodeoing a stray stallion in the wild.

The surprised Chieftain shook his back, however Jerome slashed his sword at the Brute's neck, even though it slipped away due to the remaining shield saving the Brute's neck it gave enough time for Douglas to reload his rifle and aimed once more time at the brute broad torso and open fired. This time the powerful, close impact of the bullets weakened the remaining shield, which finally flickered and gave out under the combined bullets' kinetic energy. This time Jerome was able to pierce the energy sword into the Brute's neck as the sword burned through the exposed skin as it sliced through the creature's great arteries and veins. Feral choked on his own blood which was oozing through the sword wound in massive spurts. In one final attempt the Brute swung his own hammer at his back, which caught Jerome on his back as he was on top of the brute's back. This

sudden blow weakened the Spartan's grip on the sword; therefore Feral got hold of Jerome on his helmet and flung him on Douglas like a ragdoll. Both the Spartans were disoriented as two half ton metals collided with each other. Fortunately before they could recover the Brute Chieftain fell to his knee. Jerome finally stood up, walked up to the dying brute and removed the sword clean from the creature's body and made a slicing movement at the creature which took the Brute's head clean off from its body.

Meanwhile both Elch 'Jarusee and Elme 'Rugutee were even match as they both were holding onto each other's weapon wrist and both were wrestling to get their weapon's tip onto the opponent's temple. The Brute Cheiftain's massive head with its elaborate head crown came rolling over and the sudden scream of dismay from the spectators slightly distracted the ultra. As he looked away to see what happened to his Cheiftain's fate the Shipmaster tackled the elite to his knee empowering his strength over him as he got his opening to fire the human shotgun at the Ultra's face. Even though Elch 'Jarusee lost his balance and his concentration for a split second he ducked when the shotgun was fired which saved his head, but the shards did its damage as it directly hit his helmet and knocked him cold.

Before any enraged Jiralhanaes and Kig-Yars came rushing into the ship's bridge, the Shipmaster pointed his shotgun at the door controls and fired. The damaged console automatically sealed the doors as per the default protocol. Elme 'Rugutee threw his shotgun aside and raised the fallen elite by his neck.

"Betrayal and disloyalty are the two most terrible sins and you have committed them brother," the Shipmaster said looking at his knocked out opponent. His voice carried a surprising pity rather than rage as he took the Ultra's sword from his hip, activated it and pierced it through Elch 'Jarusee' heart with a deafening scream. In his entire career he has never killed a fellow Sangheili and the pain was unbearable. Finally he tossed the corpse aside and turned to face the two Spartans.

Douglas instantly raised his rifle at the shipmaster, but Jerome asked him to stand down as Douglas lowered his weapon reluctantly with a distrust look at the elite. Elme 'Rugutee deactivated his sword and made a silent nod at his unexpected allies; Jerome replied back with same courtesy nod. But before the Sangheili and Spartans could communicate with each other, the massive, raged arousal outside bridge's door silenced and suddenly they turned into screams of terror. Both the Spartans and the Elite moved closer to the semi transparent door to have a look out due to the sudden change in mood outside.

They saw the Jiralhanaes and Kig-Yars scurvy around screaming as they shot random shots at unknown assailants behind them. As the crowd cleared the Spartans and the Shipmaster was able to have a clear look at the incoming new threat, it was the Flood. Mutilated body forms of elites in their combat form followed by hundreds of flood spores came running towards the panicked Jiralhanaes and Kig-Yars. Within minutes the flood hunted every single brute and jackals and infected them to form more flood forms. Both the Spartans and the Elite saw in horror as flood forms finally started to slam onto the bridge's door in order to gain access of the ship.

Elme 'Rugutee moved away from the door and ran toward the bridge's

main consoles followed by the Spartans. The Ship master try to activate the ship's internal camera to have a better look at the present dire situation to find out how or from where the flood has gained the access into the ship. Unfortunately all the ship's interior cameras were offline, disabled by his betrayer. Only the ship's hangar bay cameras were online, which he activated. And to his surprise and to the Spartans, many flood forms were pouring out of the human's Pelican.

"You brought the infection with you?" the Shipmaster growled at the Spartans.

Jerome moved closer to the screen as his covenant translation software kicked in translating the Elite's question. "No, of course not," he replied back with an insulted tone.

Once Elme's armor translated the English, he pointed at the screen as he zoomed the pelican which clearly shows flood spores running out of the vehicle. Jerome slowly turned toward Douglas in horror as his partner articulated for him, "Alice!"

* * *

><p>Author's Note: If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!

17. Climax part II

Chapter Sixteen

Climax part II: The Great Journey

Serina felt like she was trapped in eternal darkness; she felt quite lifeless as she kept trying to reboot herself back to life; however, her core was offline and it was in control of another intelligence. She was inactive for less than an hour, but it felt like an eternity as she kept running through all possible solutions to fix her current situation. She felt helpless, but she kept battling it out. The only advantage she had over her tyrant is the knowledge she possessed over the system. Spirit of Fire was her home and there is nothing she doesn't know about her home. After continuously bombarding the foreign A.I. she saw an opening, right when the flood A.I. was distracted in communicating with its other flood form both in the UNSC and Covenant ships. Serina trapped the other A.I. into an endless loop of traps containing viruses, those she collected and quarantined from her system as years passed.

The flood A.I. which was never exposed to such malwares literally paused a millisecond to sort out the mess. This fraction of second was enough for Serina to take over the system as she shut the other A.I. into an encrypted program which will take even the most smartest A.I. (Such as Serina) atleast five minutes to figure it all out. The moment she took over the system, the whole ship went dark as the system started rebooting.

"What the hell happened?" Captain Cutter asked as once again the bridge went dark.

"It looks likeâ€œ!" Ellen Anders looked around in astonishment,

"the system is rebooting!"

And true to her words the system came back online and this time instead of a distorted hologram, Serina, a beautiful looking hologram rose from the pedestal.

"What? Serina is that you?" Captain Cutter asked in disbelief and along with him the crew in the bridge gave a small cry of happiness.

"Captain I don't have much time, what do you want me to do. Order me immediately," Serina rushed as her face betrayed fear and anxiety.

Captain Cutter composed himself as he finally saw some hope, "Contact the Red team right away."

Serina quickly opened a secure channel to the red team leader, but she received back nothing but heavy static.

"Keep trying," Ellen Anders urged as she also tried to contact them through her private datapad, but she had no luck with that.

Serina kept pinging at the Spartans, but there was no response. When she almost gave up, to her's and everyone else surprise they got an incoming signal from the covenant ship itself. Once the Captain gave a go-signal, Serina accepted the incoming signal and played it out loud over the bridge's speakers.

"This is Spartan-092, do anyone copy me over!" Jerome voice broke through the speakers.

Hearing a Spartans voice through the covenant ship gave everyone an immense joy, because Spartans have achieved what they were set out for, they have conquered the enemy ship. Everyone was thrilled because now they got a ticket back home.

"It's about damn time son," Cutter greeted with relief. "What is your situation?"

"Sir, flood has taken over the ship and we are locked in the bridge," the answer came. Even though the spartan's tone was calm, it betrayed hopelessness.

After hearing this news, everyone's hope plummeted once more. The Spartans are not in any better position than they were.

"Son, what do you mean by in the bridge? Are you in control of the ship?" Cutter clarified.

After few seconds of pause, "Yes sir, we are in control of the ship's bridge."

"Good," Cutter replied and started to ponder on given options.

Serina's hologram started to flicker as she said, "Captain I can't hold any longer!"

"Alright, we don't have any other option. Son, I have one last order

for you. Glass this ship," Captain Cutter finally said.

Everyone around him gave out a cry of protest as Anders and Serina blinked at each other in shock.

Corporeal James finally broke out the chaos, "Everyone shut you're a-hole. He is the Captain and his orders are final. Anyone else dare to question him, I will personally hang you before the plasma beam hits this ship." After Corporeal's outbreak every single marines kept their personal opinions to themselves.

"Do I make myself clear?" Corporeal James shouted.

"Sir, yes sir," came the reply.

"Thank you James," Cutter said. "We cannot allow the flood to take control; if they leave this system they will destroy every single living thing in this universe. Forgive me, I have no other options."

"It's ok Captain, it is the right choice," Anders finally said as she stood tall next to him and forced a smile upon her face.

"Spartan, after glassing the ship, you know what to do," Cutter said as he once again spoke to the comm.

"Understood sir, it's been a honor," Jerome replied.

"No son, the honor is all mine. Cutter out," and the line disconnected.

"You made the right call Captain," Serina said as she struggled to keep the other intelligence at bay.

"Yes you did friend," Corporeal James said as he extended his hand to the Captain, who took it and said, "I couldn't have asked for a better crew."

* * *

><p>Once the line got disconnected Jerome looked up at the Shipmaster, but before he could say anything the Elite opened his jaws, "Your leader is right, there is no other option. So much of valor and loyalty. I'm truly moved by your leader's act, I'm proud to have such a worthy advisory."</p>

"But today we are not enemies, we are brothers. You will not be dying today alone but with friends," Jerome said.

Elme 'Rugutee was deeply moved by the sentiment as he placed his hand over his chest and said, "What would you want your friend to do?"

"I want you to do what you are best at, glass that ship," Jerome said with a heavy heart.

"But it takes time," Elme responded as he started the process of aligning his ship's powerful plasma cannon over the Spirit of Fire, which was lying down over the dark side of the moon surface like a possum.

"He is right," Douglas said, "Within few minutes these floods will break into the bridge."

"We can't open these doors to engage them, they will swarm us in seconds," Jerome said as he kept thinking how to buy some time while the glassing occurred.

"Leave that to me," the shipmaster said as he opened a comm with his seraph fighters who were hovering over the downed Spirit of Fire.
"Brothers, this is your shipmaster speaking, the ship is been run over by the flood, I want you two to return back to the ship and fight your way to the bridge."

"Yes master," the reply came as the two seraph fighters turned toward their covenant ship and flew back.

"Once my sangheilis enter the ship, they will be a distraction for a moment," Elme told.

"You do know that your warriors will not last long," Jerome said with pity in his tone.

"I know, they will be honored to die for their leader," Elme said as he looked away to the console before him as he prepared to fire his heavy plasma cannon.

Before he could click the final button, Jerome stopped him, "It is my duty." Elme nodded and moved over as Jerome stood before the console and pushed the button that every UNSC personal dreaded.

When the plasma hit the UNSC ship it was like thousand nukes going off in unison. It instantly melted the metal like cotton burning under the fire. The shock shook the ship as it gave below the massive pressure as it further eroded in to the moon's surface. The ship melted layer by layer in seconds.

Ellen Anders held Captain Cutter's hand tightly as James gave one final salute toward his soldiers when the bright light engulfed them as they were all vaporized atom by atom in a second.

In seventy seconds the whole ship blinked out of existence as it was vaporized to oblivion. The entire surface of the moon which supported the late Spirit of fire cracked and burned into a glossy furnace as the plasma beam finally reached the surface.

Once it was done, Jerome let go of the console and stepped back as grief overwhelmed him. Douglas rested his hand over his team leader in silence as Elme stood there with his head held low as he silently paid homage to all the lives that were lost for the greater good. At this moment, this was the 'Great journey' according to him, not the filth his Prophets were pouring upon his kind.

Meanwhile few flood forms were dispersed as they ran away from the bridge's external doors to the hangar bay as new threats in the form of the elites appeared over there.

"One final thing to do," Jerome said as he took the detonator of the HAVOK nuke that the spartans brought with them in their pelican.

"For human kindâ€|" Jerome stopped and looked at the Elite and continued, "â€|For all sentient beings." Both Elme and Douglas nodded back in silence as Jerome clicked the trigger.

A small sun appeared near the orbit of the moon as the nuke exploded.

* * *

><p>Author's Note: If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!

18. Epilogue

Epilogue

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure Captain."

"Did you pick up something?" the Captain asked as he sipped his hot coffee while noticing his artificial intelligence's face dance with lights.

"I'm picking up a lot of debris from the scanner," the A.I. replied as she tried to concentrate on her scan results.

"Point me," the Captain said as he moved closer to the monitors.

"Roughly here," the A.I pointed near a star system.

"Is that where the signal originated?" the Captain asked as he placed his coffee cup down and walked closer to the monitor.

"It's been 36 hours since the signal disappeared, but if I had to guess then yes, this is where the signal should have originated."

"Interesting," the Captain replied as he studied this system. There were two suns surrounded by five gas planets and each gas planets had varying number of moons around them.

"Is any of these planets viable?" the Captain asked as he tried to study the each planet using the ship's scanner.

"Give me a moment," the A.I whispered as she ran some additional scans after the Captain's request.

After few minutes, "None," she replied.

"Alright then, takes us near the planet from which the signal originated."

"Signal we 'Presume' as the origin place," A.I corrected as she maneuvered the ship near the second planet from the major sun.

"There," A.I pointed at the debris surrounding the planet's moon

which were orbiting around in a very haphazard fashion. "Running a scan on them," she said as she parked the ship between the planet and its moon. "I'm picking a lot of residual radioactivity from this area."

After a few seconds of silence, "Interesting, based on these debris sizes, composure and design it looks like covenant in origin," A.I reported.

"Covenant?" the Captain visibly tensed. "Have you searched this system?"

"There are no Covenants around here at the moment Captain, the scans are clean," A.I reassured as she try to reassemble all the pieces together.

"But, the signal was UNSC in origin not the covenant," the Captain said as he was clearly confused.

"Maybe they got here before us," A.I speculated.

"Probably but I'm glad they gave one hell of a fight before they went out," Captain said as he lowered his cap from his head.

"Here," the A.I projected a three dimensional holographic picture before the captain. "After reassembling all the pieces together with my knowledge of the entire known Covenant space carriers, this looks like the remaining of a Covenant battle cruiser. To be more specific, this is the tip of the cruiser."

"Looks oddly intact; what do you think could have happened to it?"

"Looks like an explosion from within, probably from the back, inner part of the cruiser. The explosion must have engulfed three fourth of the ship," A.I said.

"How come you are so sure about it?"

A.I recreated a visual explosion with a presumed blast radius as she tried to explain it to the Captain, "The length of this cruiser is 1782.2 m, width is 861.7 m and the height is 230.8 m. If this nose had to escape from an explosion fairly untouched the explosion should have originated here with this blast radius," she marked the lower decks of the hangar bay which was located in the back with a big circle representing the blast radius. "This blast radius is equivalent to a HAVOK nuke, coincides with the amount of radioactivity here."

"Interesting," the Captain wondered as he studied the 'assumed' theory presented before him. "Big chunk of nose is still intact, maybe someone could have survived in it."

"I'm fairly sure that part of the ship should have lost its atmosphere. Only way someone could have survived it is if they had an atmosphere ventilator suit," the A.I said.

"It's been 36 hours. It's highly unlikely someone's suit would hold up that long, however I want this to be cleaned up ASAP. Send in a recon pelican with ODSTs. I want a clean sweep of that ship."

"Aye aye Captain," A.I said as she gave out the orders. "A pelican is prepped and ready to launch in five."

"Excellent," the Captain said as he eased back on to his chair. "Keep scanning, I don't want any surprise."

"Will do Captain."

"And also search for our USNC ship."

* * *

><p>8 minutes laterâ€|

"Captain, the ODSTs have landed into the remaining part of the ship," A.I announced.

"Good, keep me updated."

After ten long minutes one of the ODSTs called back, "This is O-88 to the Kingfisher."

"Go for Kingfisher," the Captain replied back.

"Sir, you are not going believe what we just found here," the ODST voice broke through.

"What is it soldier?"

"We have a live Spartan here!"

* * *

><p>Author's Note: I want to sincerely thank my readers for taking their time to read my story. If you have any questions about the ending please do let me know, I will answer them. I know its a cliff hanger and everyone hates one, but I do have my reasons for it :)**

If you like my writing please do check out my other story "The Composer"

**I had to put that story on hold due to this one. If you like that story's premise please do let me know so I will continue it. Thank you once again! **

End
file.